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## Significance of Multilingual Education on Elementary Schoolers

### Abstract

The world has become seemingly smaller with the advancements of technologies, instead of taking days to receive a written letter, it takes seconds to get an email. While the connection is obvious there still seems to be a barrier between the majority of the world's population: Language. Though it seems irrelevant in people's small communities, the social complexities that language has are worth the recognition, because of the importance of communication. People's ways of using language differ but they all have a median goal, to get their messages across. Language is based on lettered rules that are meant to give emotion, information, and power. Recently however it has come to light that the ability to speak multiple languages can close the gap of miscommunication within cultures.

### Introduction

There has been a discussion on how to develop multilingualism, and a multitude of research has been done. It's been concluded that education systems are where it can be most effectively taught. Practices of multilingualism have been taught in curriculums around the world for ages, with different ideas on how to teach it to students. Multilingualism has now been ingrained in the world of American education, where most schools either have an exclusive bilingual education or a specific class dedicated to solely learning another language to develop multilingualism. The

trend that has been noticed is that the younger the student the easier it is for them to grasp learning multiple languages or building literacy.

## Methods

Schools that are based on a multilingual curriculum tend to have a designed framework of language education meant to not only better the student's vocabulary and literacy in the language but also an understanding of culture. In general, if young elementary students are immersed in a multilingual education system they are more likely to develop literacy in their mother tongue, the ability to comprehend new language/concepts, as well as becoming more open-minded to unfamiliar cultures.

In the United States implementation of bilingual education in schools has grown significantly in comparison to other countries. With this growth, it has also sparked debates on its necessity within the country and its educational impact. It has come to light that bilingual education is ingrained in our country's history more than one would originally think.

According to historical research done by author and teacher Claude Goldenberg, bilingual education has been an American tradition, even before the country became its own. The first instance of bilingual education within the United States would be with 17th-century Polish settlers who were needed for construction projects within communities, they were allowed to bring their families so their children needed a place to learn. They were granted the ability to build schools that would teach them in their native language and English. With the aftermath of World War 1 a multitude of German students were relocated to the United States. Because of this German and English bilingual schools were opened across the country. With the uproar of

immigrants throughout the United States multilingual schools opened up and became increasingly common, “bilingual schools for Scandinavian languages in the Dakotas, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, among other states; Dutch bilingual schools in Michigan; Czech bilingual schools in Nebraska and Texas; Italian and Polish bilingual schools in Wisconsin; French bilingual schools in Louisiana, Ohio, and throughout the northeast; and Spanish bilingual schools in the southwest” (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015, pg. 5).

## Results

All these schools mentioned had a common goal. To help educate the students and bring them to their maximum potential through the most powerful spruce for humans: language. The ultimate goal would be to teach students in their mother tongue so they could grasp the basics of their education with no barriers, they would then also learn in English so they could adapt to their new environment and feel comfortable in their communities, which may not have been so welcoming for non-English speakers. While the reasons for multilingual education have furthered from learning in native languages because of the increasing number of communities across the nation, American doctors and researchers have worked on finding new benefits to learning multiple languages in school.

With the adoption of multilingual education America has grown its teaching systems, and how educators are interpreting this new form of learning. For years multilingual education was put under political scrutiny, with other bills such as the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the prioritization of multilingual students was pushed under the rug. The bilingual education movement was also turned away in some communities because of their racist

intentions, people wanted minority students to fend for themselves, without any special accommodations. To this day this continues to be an issue. It is clear that restricting multilingual education doesn't help anyone, nor does it change anything. The other side argued that it is better to put in a small system that will at least help some students instead of none.

With the research on young students' brains and their development it has become increasingly obvious to researchers that it is more beneficial for young children to learn languages early on instead of later in life because of the "malleability" their brains have. Baum, a neuroscience doctor has researched the young brain and its cognitive abilities and has deduced that when a brain is learning a new language, based on the experiences that they have had in life the ability to comprehend is greater. Though this type of research is still in its infancy and very difficult to conduct as each person being researched is significantly different, the benefits being discovered are numerous.

When it comes to multilingual education it is good to know the possible medical benefits on the brain, and the impact it has on the schooling programs, it is most important to realize the student's perspective on their education. Each student is very different in the way they learn and what is most beneficial to them. Multilingual education can provide a broad spectrum of how their pupils are taught and how they learn best. According to Asher Bruns, a student of the International School of Denver who was immersed in multilingual education throughout his elementary school years noticed the various individualistic impacts it had on him. He has viewed numerous positive impacts that have helped him in his day, in a personal interview he states, "Multilingual education has had is allowing me to travel in France and not feel too out of place. I have been able to vacation in France, and I've never had problems communicating with locals"

(Bruns, 2024, pg. 1). The fact that a person native to the United States with American parents can go to a new country with no prior experience there can speak fluently with natives. Because of his multilingual education, he was granted more opportunities which rounded his educational experiences.

Not only does multilingual education provide opportunities and experiences it also opens up students' minds to new cultures and ideals. According to Victoria Strobos who also experienced multilingual education throughout the entirety of her primary education felt that "multilingual education has made me a more open-minded person when it comes to learning about different cultures and increased my appreciation for cultural diversity" She adds, "I think learning a second language is a useful skill for elementary schoolers to become more culturally aware" (Strobos, 2024, pg. 1). In this day and age with the emergence of a multitude of cultures throughout the nation, elementary schoolers need to become aware of the surroundings and become outstanding citizens.

Ever since the world became more connected than ever it is important to realize the rise of multilingualism and its importance, especially for people who want to successfully participate and network efficiently in academic principles. While solely learning English can provide its opportunities, it is not enough to set people apart. Becoming multilingual at a young age helps engage students in more cultural environments, and opens doors to more opportunities, especially those across the world.

If taught effectively being taught English literacy in the United States and another language to enhance cultural understanding and multilingual principles there is barely a negative impact on the opportunities that will be presented to those being educated.

## Discussion

Historically and to the present immigration and migration have become a big part of American culture. Parents who have attempted to find a new life for their children can benefit if accessibility to multilingual education is presented. They and their children will be able to begin to adapt to their new environment while also keeping up with their base culture.

This just further proves how much multilingual education can help young students of all backgrounds, it can help tie them together and further the educational opportunities, needed in their current environment and wherever they decide to take their lives next.

It is important to realize that if one wants a maximized impact on their children they need to realize the implications of language policies, and multilingual curriculums to further that. It will create a more positive and effective classroom where all students can feel included.

With the overlap of American culture and other cultures, it is important to recognize how we can tie them together, and how to educate young students in this ever-changing world on the importance and impact of knowing multiple languages.

It has to be noted that bilingual education is not the solution for all students and their academics. Many argue that it is unnecessary, especially in the United States where everyone

speaks English and there is just as much opportunity for them compared to multilingual students. According to the attorney general who proposed a ballot initiative meant to further English proficiency in multilingual programs. They state that the most important aspect for elementary schoolers in America is to develop English proficiency before they even try to learn another language to minimize any confusion.

The goal is to establish a well-rounded understanding of the English language and to rapidly increase understanding without any other programs getting in the way and slowing down student progress on English literacy.

It should be established that schools should not establish multilingual education curriculums without parental consent, because it is possible that learning another language on top of English can prevent the primary needs of academic development. If the parent doesn't want their child to be fluent in two languages because of these concerns schools need to find a new approach to how they implement multilingualism.

Bruns in a personal interview also stated how bilingual education came with a multitude of benefits as well as a consequence, "Since my multilingual school was so far out of the ordinary schooling people got, I feel a bit isolated because my experience was different from everyone else" (Bruns, 2024, pg. 1). If multilingual programs don't become a norm it is also very possible that students' differences in education may hinder social development because of a barrier of understanding.

Overall it is important to realize that not everything can only be about the benefits and people need to learn what academic form is ultimately the best for their development.

At the end of the day, it's obvious that multilingual education for elementary schoolers provides more benefits than issues. It provides a place for students to understand their culture, and gain literacy in their community language and another language that may ultimately bring them opportunities for the future.

With all the research that has been done, it is clear that it is important to include multilingual curriculums in elementary schools because it is the age group where their brain is the most malleable, and susceptible to grasping new concepts quicker.

There are so many different forms of education and each student learns differently. Because of the broadness and all the different aspects that multilingual education provides it appeals to a wider range of students. It is important to recognize that significance and move forward into curriculums that benefit children of all ages and walks of life, to provide them with community and opportunity.

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